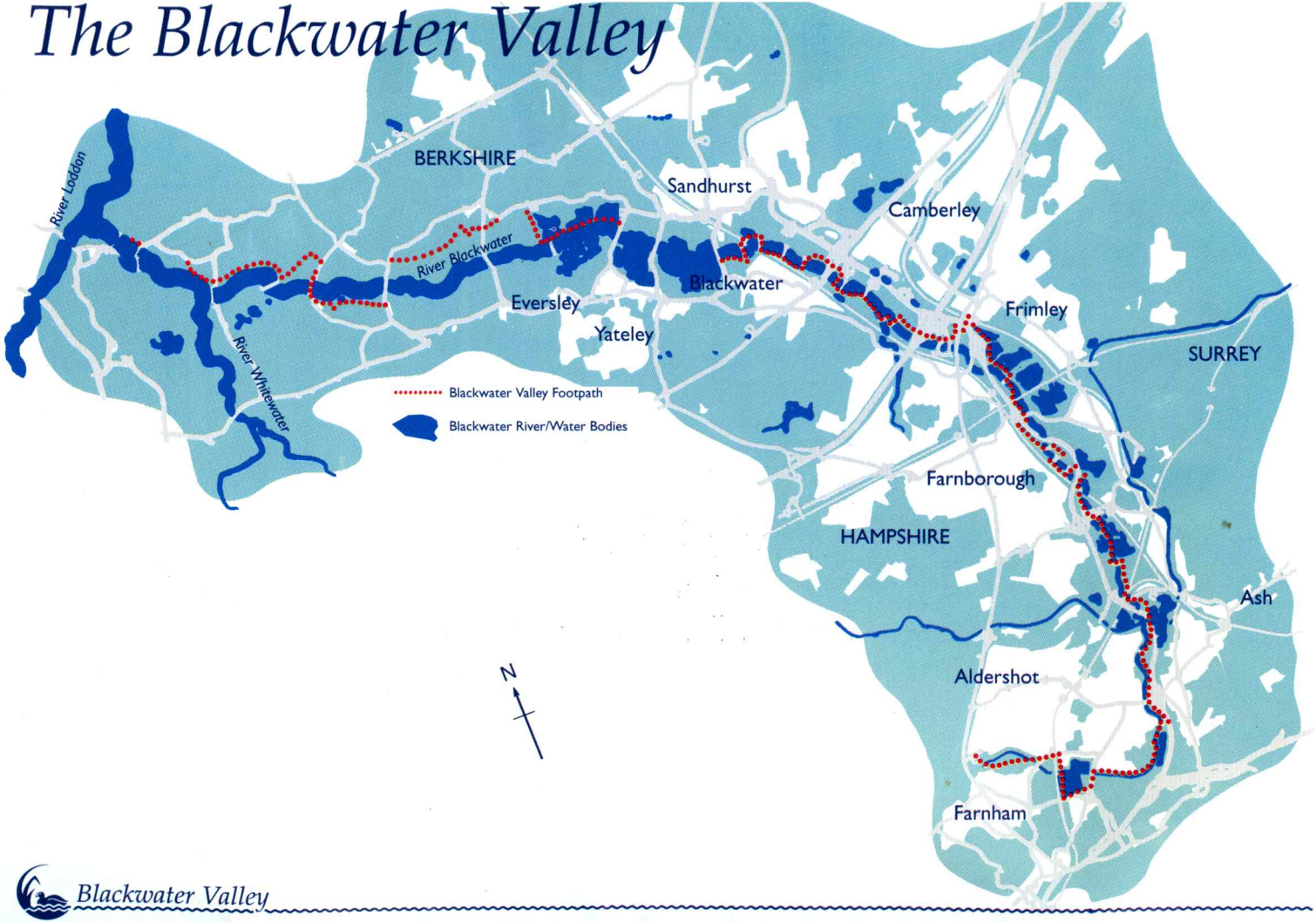
Discover

The Blackwater Valley Footpath

Blackwater Valley

The Blackwater Valley



Blackwater Valley

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INTRODUCTION

The Blackwater Valley Footpath is a completely new long distance path being developed by the Blackwater Valley Recreation and Countryside Management Service through negotiation with local authorities and private landowners. This has involved the creation of many new sections of footpath.

The route follows the River Blackwater from its source in Rowhill Nature Reserve to Swallowfield. When completed the path will be 38 km long. Already 33 km are open to public use.

Sections 4, 5 and 6 and the southern part of section 3 have ramp access and a hard surfaced path suitable for disabled users.

ROUTE DESCRIPTIONS
To enable clear directions of some complex path sections, the maps in this booklet are not all drawn to the same scale.
Map symbols used are shown on the inside back cover.

OTHER MAPS
The area of the walk is covered by the Ordnance Survey Landranger No. 186 (Aldershot, Guildford) or in more detail by the OS Pathfinder series sheets SU 84/94 (Farnham & Godalming), SU 85/95 (Farnborough & Aldershot), SU 86/96 (Bracknell & Ascot) and SU 66/76 (Mortimer & Arborfield). However, as new lengths of the path are regularly being opened, some sections of footpath shown in this booklet may be omitted from published maps.

Every effort was taken to ensure this booklet was correct when printed in June 1998.

CIRCULAR WALKS
A companion booklet to this one detailing circular walks using the Blackwater Valley Footpath is currently in preparation.

LATEST INFORMATION
Opportunities to improve the route of the path will be taken as they arise. New sections will continue to be opened at irregular intervals. The Blackwater Valley Service can supply up to the minute information, telephone 01276 686615.

TRANSPORT
If you are doing a linear walk, a good network of railways and other public transport provide a means - especially in the Southern end of the Valley - to return to your starting point.

INTRODUCTION TO 2ND EDITION
This revised edition includes details of a new stretch of riverside footpath (part of sections 10 and 11).

For each section distances are now given together with grid references for their starting points.

ROWHILL TO BADSHOT LEA

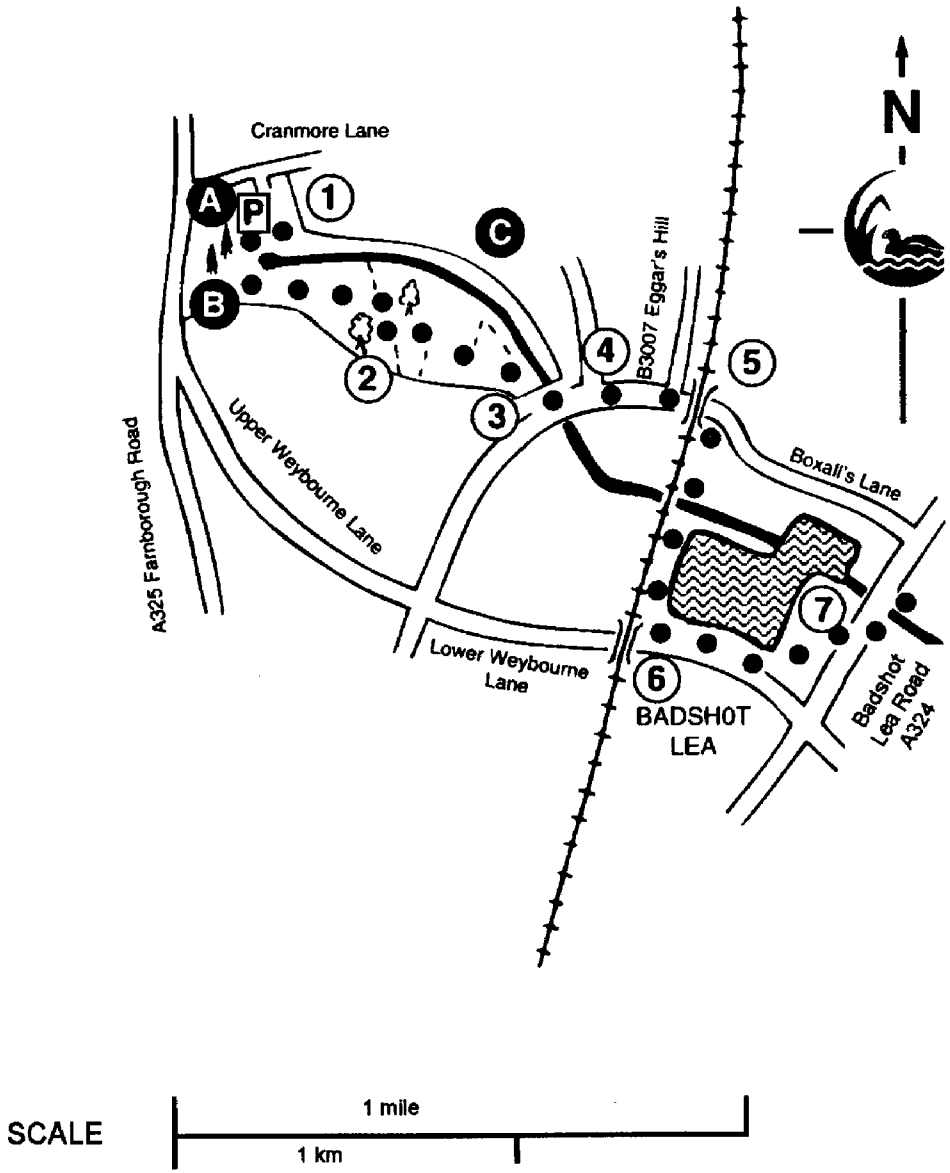
Starting point SU500849. Distance 2.9km (total 2.9 km).

1. Start on the track at the lower end of the car park beside the white house. At the source of the River Blackwater bear left.
2. At the T junction of paths go right, keep on this path heading straight on ignoring the many side paths in the wood. Pass the field on your left.
3. Leave the wood via Parkland Grove, turn left at the end into Weybourne Road.
4. Pass the pub then cross the road and head under the railway into Boxall's Lane.
5. Just after railway turn right, follow path at base of railway embankment, the ditch you cross is the River Blackwater.
6. At Lower Weybourne Lane turn left, then just before houses take the path left alongside stream.
7. Follow stream behind houses and later garage, then cross Badshot Lea Road. Turn left to Pea Bridge and rejoin the River Blackwater.

A. ROWHILL VISITOR CENTRE
Open every Sunday 2-5 p.m., staffed by volunteer members of Rowhill Nature Reserve Society.

B. SOURCE OF RIVER BLACKWATER
The spring line at this sphagnum bog marks the junction between the higher sands of the surrounding heathlands and the impervious clay soils of the woodland.

C. ROWHILL NATURE RESERVE
Ancient woodland with coppice still worked by Rowhill conservation volunteers. Many woodland plants with excellent display of spring flowers, including Bluebells, Violets and Wood Anemones. The clay across much of Rowhill was extracted for bricks, etc., so forming the ponds and many wet areas in the wood.



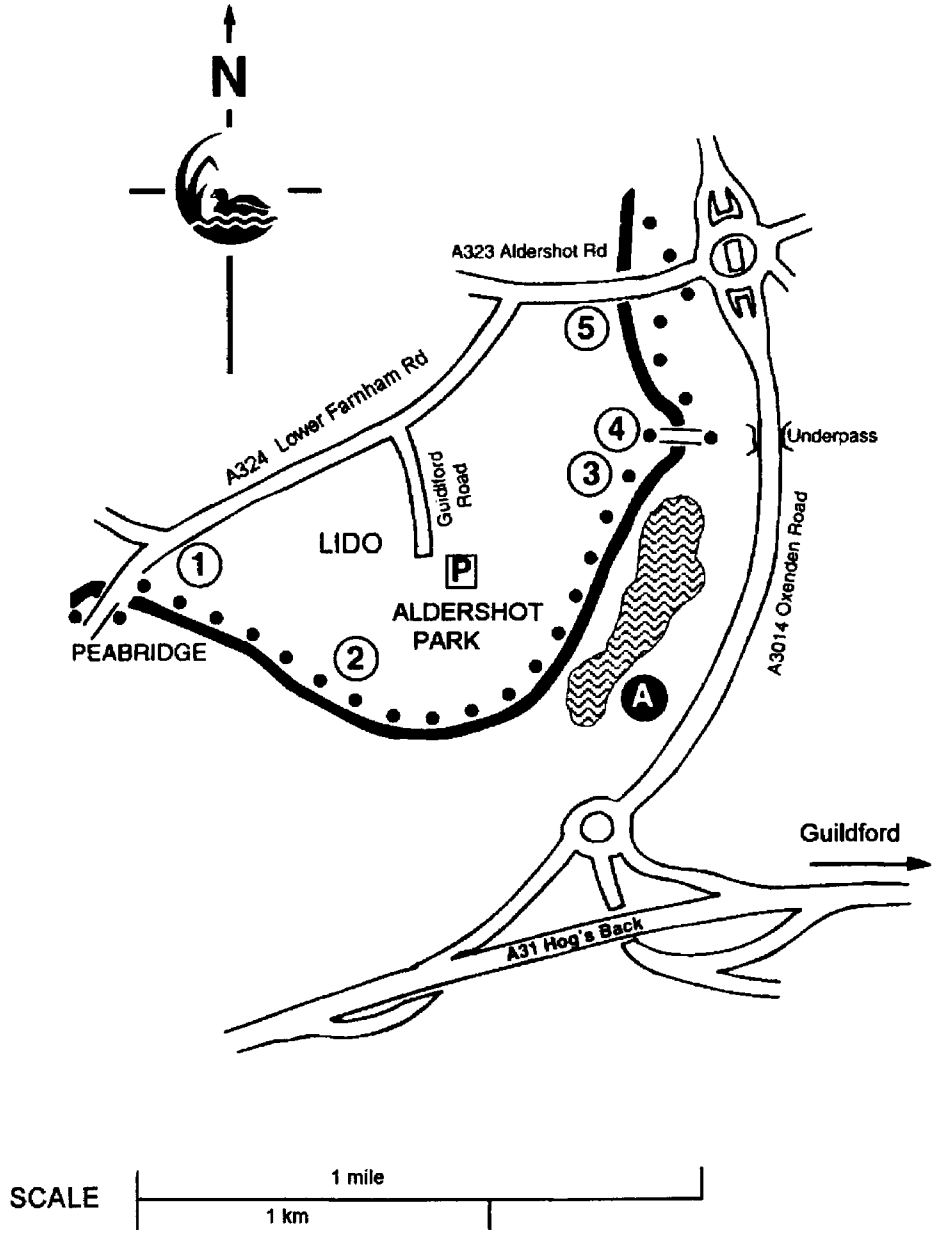
BADSHOT LEA TO TONGHAM

Starting point SU868491. Distance 2.5 km (total 5.4 km).

1. Pea Bridge follow path on north bank of the River.
2. The surfaced path eventually starts to veer away from the River, take the un-surfaced path back to the riverbank behind the crematorium and through Aldershot Park.
3. Continue on the riverbank behind the school.
4. Past the school grounds cross the River on the bridge opposite the pedestrian underpass, turn left to follow the River.
5. Turn right towards the roundabout, cross road at marked crossing point. **Busy road crossing, please take care**. Bear right and then take access track on the left to rejoin riverside path.

A. TONGHAM NURSERY
Worked for gravel in 1993/5 to supply the minerals for the Blackwater Valley Relief Road. Prior to gravel extraction the site revealed evidence of Prehistoric, Roman and medieval settlements. Five Iron Age settlements were found, with water holes that had remained waterlogged so preserving a number of artefacts including a 2nd century BC brooch, planks and stakes and a ladder carved from a single oak log.

The site is now being restored with many trees planted around the lake. The lake itself has shallow banks and an irregular shoreline to increase its value to wildlife.



TONGHAM TO ASH

Starting point SU882500. Distance 2.9 km (total 8.3 km).

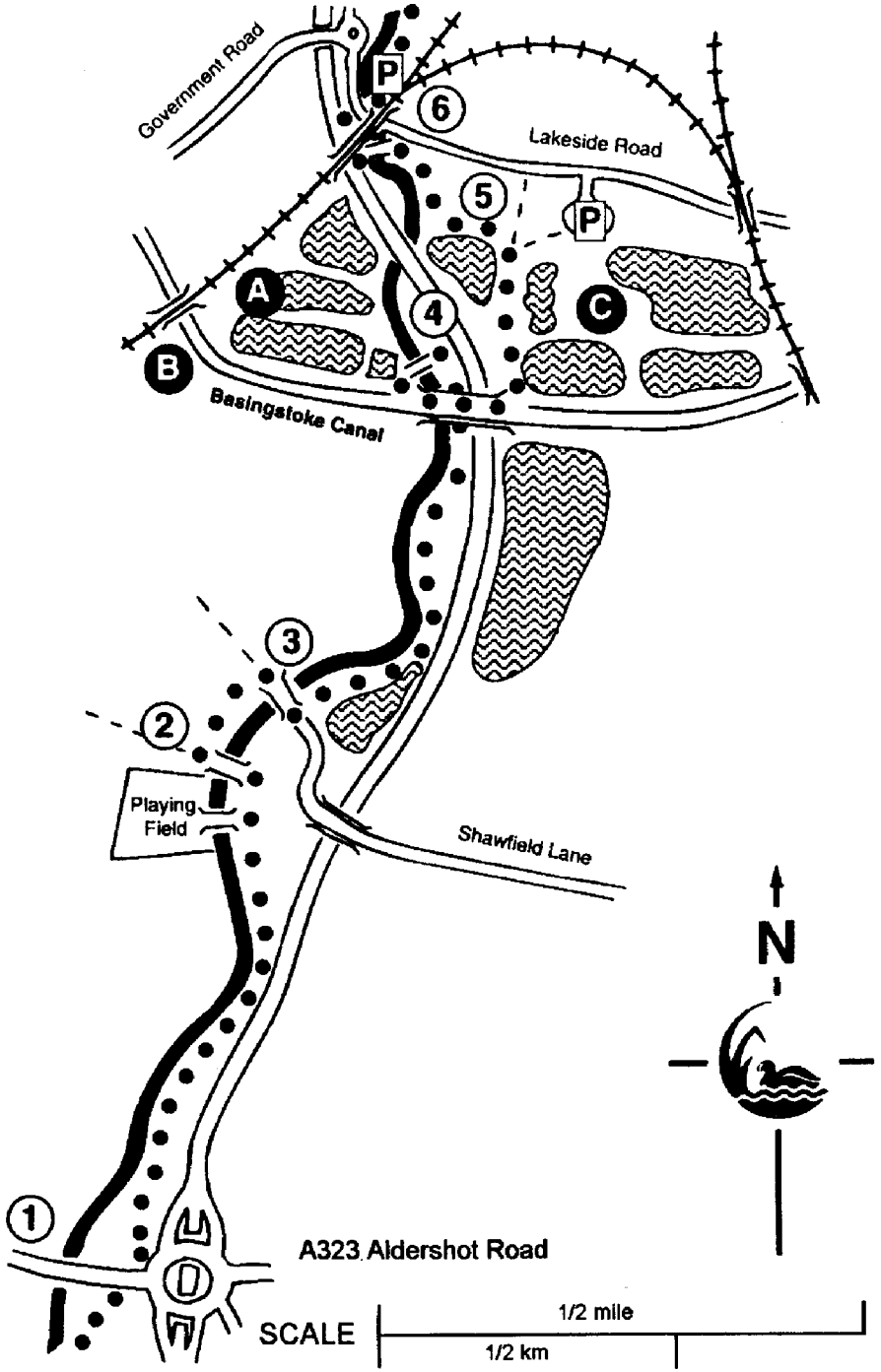
1. Join the path beside the slip road at Aldershot Road roundabout
2. Take the second footbridge over the River.
3. Cross back over the River and turn left to follow riverbank.
4. Go under canal, turn left up ramps on northernmost side of canal to access towpath. Turn left on aqueduct to cross major road, then descend left down ramps into Lakeside Park.
5. Turn left just after the lake on your left to rejoin the River.
6. **Busy road crossing, for your own safety please do not use the road under the railway.** Follow the path left before the railway, this goes under the railway beside the major road. Follow the access track back to Lakeside Road and cross straight over to Hollybush Park.

A. GOLD LAKES
Angling centre regularly used for match fishing. The earth mound on the island beside the River is a purpose built bat roost, one of the largest of its kind in Britain. The black square on its side is a solar panel to absorb heat and so create high temperatures in the upper chamber of the roost.

B. BASINGSTOKE CANAL, ASH EMBANKMENT
This raised section of canal has few overhanging trees. The consequence is a rich variety of aquatic plants that, in turn, support a wide variety of animal life.

The aqueduct has elegant but hidden engineering, being supported by steel ropes in a tensioned spiral contained within the tow paths.

C. LAKESIDE PARK
An excellent site for wildlife especially water plants & insects. In summer look for colourful dragonflies around the shallow ponds beside the path. Over 20 species have been seen here.



ASH TO NORTH CAMP

Starting point SU885519. Distance 2.3 km (total 10.6 km).

1. From Hollybush Park car park follow the track and take the left hand path which takes you down alongside the River.

2. Cross over the bridge and continue to follow the River.
   (Link path, Aldershot military town can be accessed from Hollybush Hill by going straight on after the bridge, over the Hill and over the road footbridge. This path takes you into the woodlands at the back of Ramillies Park).

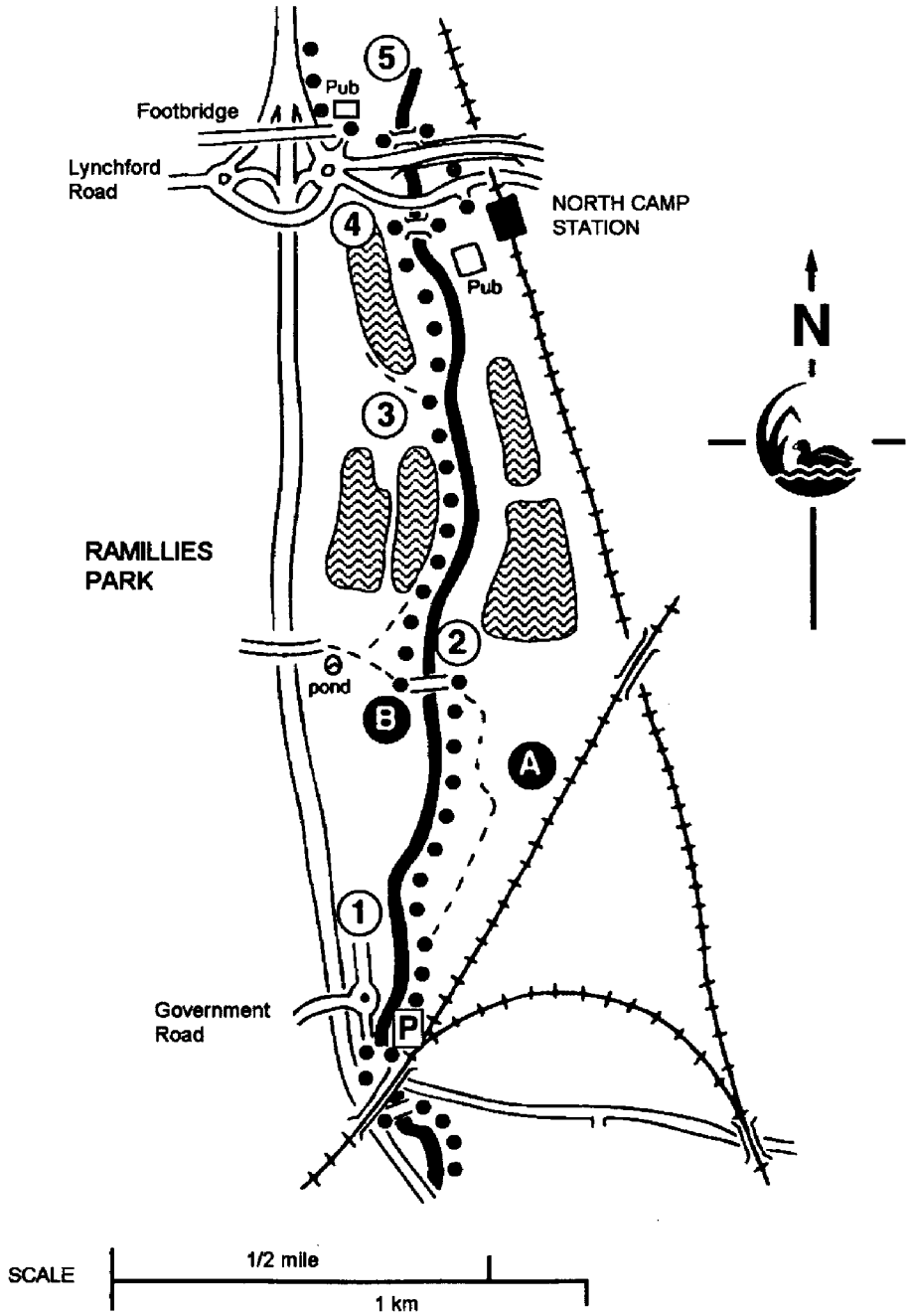
3. Take the right hand track and carry on along the River.

4. Pass the Old Ford Pub on the other side of the River, cross over the footbridge and turn left. Cross over Station Road and walk beside the River under the road bridge.

5. Head towards the large footbridge over the Blackwater Valley Relief Road. Pick up the path between the footbridge and the Fir Tree Pub.

A. HOLLYBUSH PARK
Hollybush Park is an old rubbish dump that is still undergoing restoration, ground conditions are difficult for the many trees that have been planted, progress is positive if slow.

B. HOLLYBUSH HILL
This site was a rubbish dump until 1980. It is now a good example of a created flower rich grassland. Here you can now find orchids and many other colourful flowers. These in turn support a wide variety of butterflies that appreciate the warmth of the south facing slope. The top of the hill provides a good view point.



NORTH CAMP TO MYTCHETT

Starting point SU886537. Distance 2.5 km (total 13.1 km).

1. From the Fir Tree Pub follow path next to major road as it rises to cross the railway line.

2. A ramp takes you down over the River, follow it left under the road bridge

3. Either continue along the track beside the River (no steps), or cross over the River into Gerry's Copse. A bridge at the other end of the site will rejoin the track.

4. Take path left into the small woodland. This path eventually takes you over a river bridge and through another small woodland.

5. At the end of this stretch walk up the ramp and turn right over Coleford Bridge using the roadside pavement.

6. From the Surrey side of Coleford Bridge drop onto the access track beside the River;

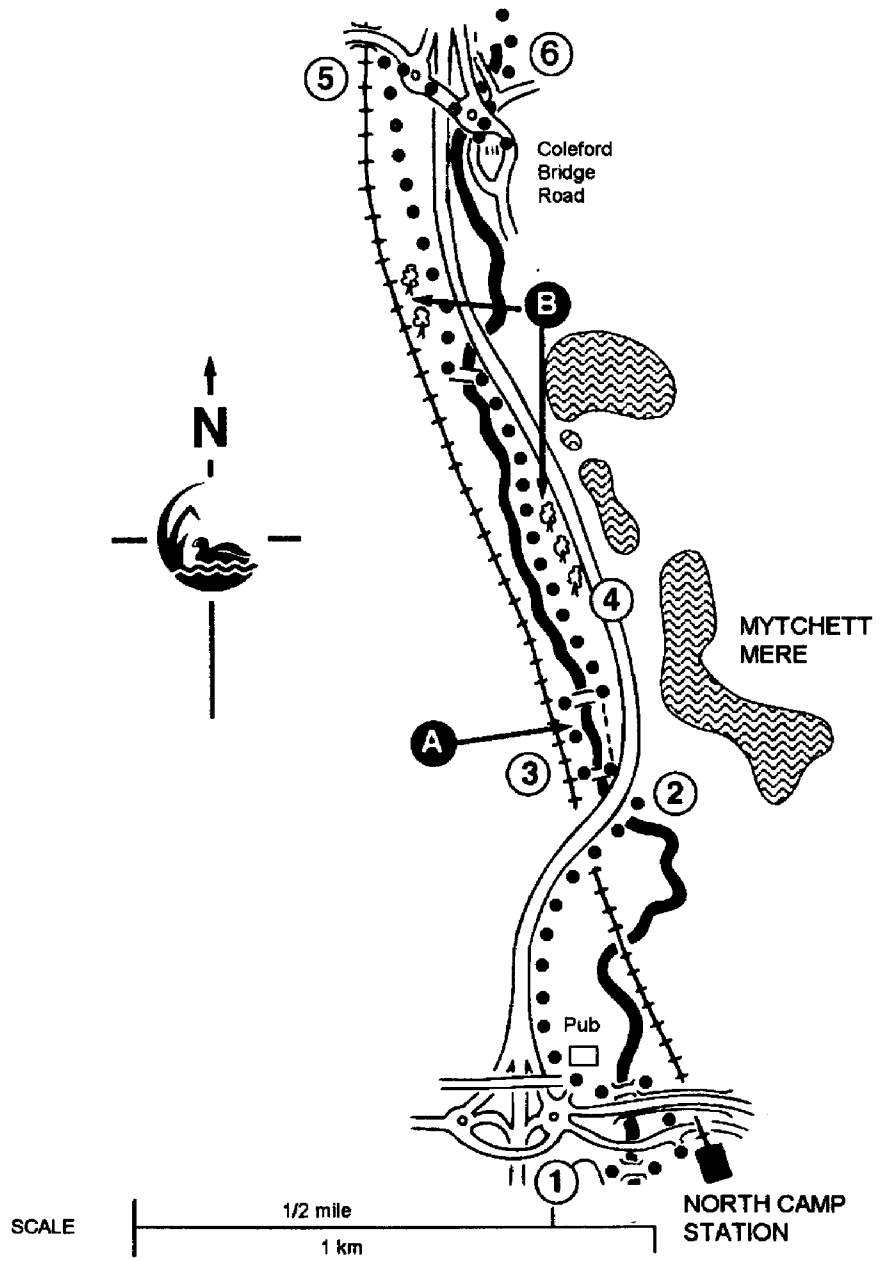
   either using the steps,

   or the track a little further down.

   Go beside the River under the road bridge

A. GERRY'S COPSE
Planted in 1996 with many Willow and Hazel to be cut (coppiced) to provide material such as hedging stakes.

B. ALDER CARRS
The Alder trees in these small woodlands each have a number of trunks, a sure sign of coppicing in the past. The trees are getting old and now are important for wildlife, look for the many woodpecker holes.



MYTCHETT TO FRIMLEY

Starting point SU880559. Distance 2.9 km (total 16.0 km).

1. After passing under the road bridge;
   either continue on this track (no steps),
   or once under bridge take path on right of River and cross back on large footbridge (steps) to rejoin track.

2. Go beneath railway, and once under next bridleway bridge cross the River and turn left to continue along the riverbank.
   (Link path, the bridleway gives links west to Farnborough North rail station, east to Frimley).

3. At Frimley Bridge follow brown footpath signs. Cross Frimley Road and immediately left to cross one way slip road using controlled crossings. Use pavement on road bridge to cross over major road.

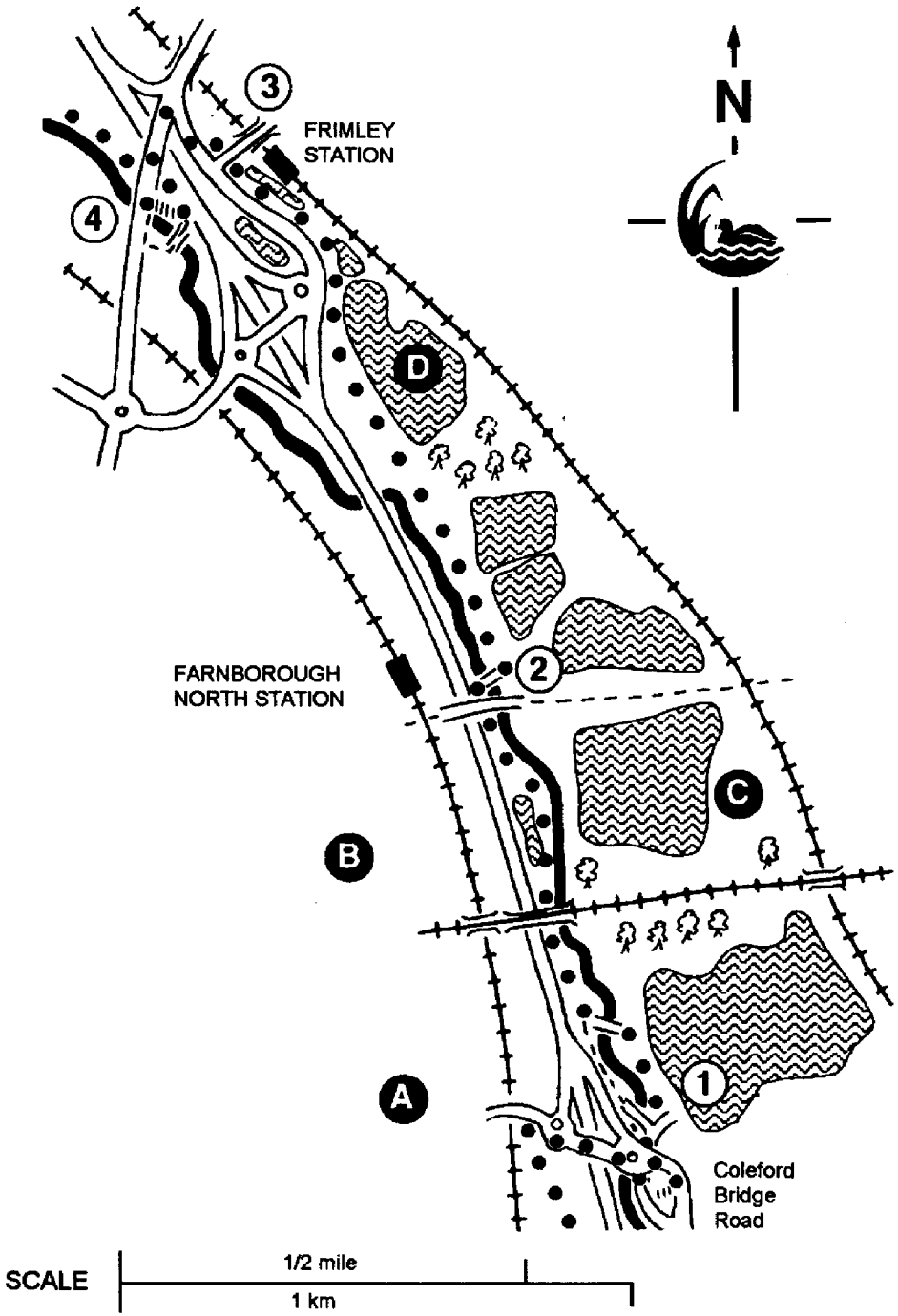
4. **Either** descend steps on left, at base turn left beside major road, go under bridge and rejoin River,
   or take the ramp further on, at base turn left and cross River, left again to follow major road under bridge and rejoin River.

A. ST MICHAEL'S ABBEY
Built in 1888 and still used by the Benedictine monks.

B. FARNBOROUGH CONVENT COLLEGE
Home from 1881-1920 of the Empress Eugene of France, founder of St Michael's Abbey.

C. FRIMLEY HATCHES
Used for angling. The southernmost lake is a good spot to observe wildfowl in winter as they become accustomed to people.

D. FRIMLEY BRIDGE LAKE
A seat here gives interesting views of the wildlife using this very shallow lake. Herons can often be seen, whilst in summer evenings it is a good spot to see bats.



FRIMLEY TO BLACKWATER

Starting point SU872576. Distance 3.0 km (total 19.0 km).

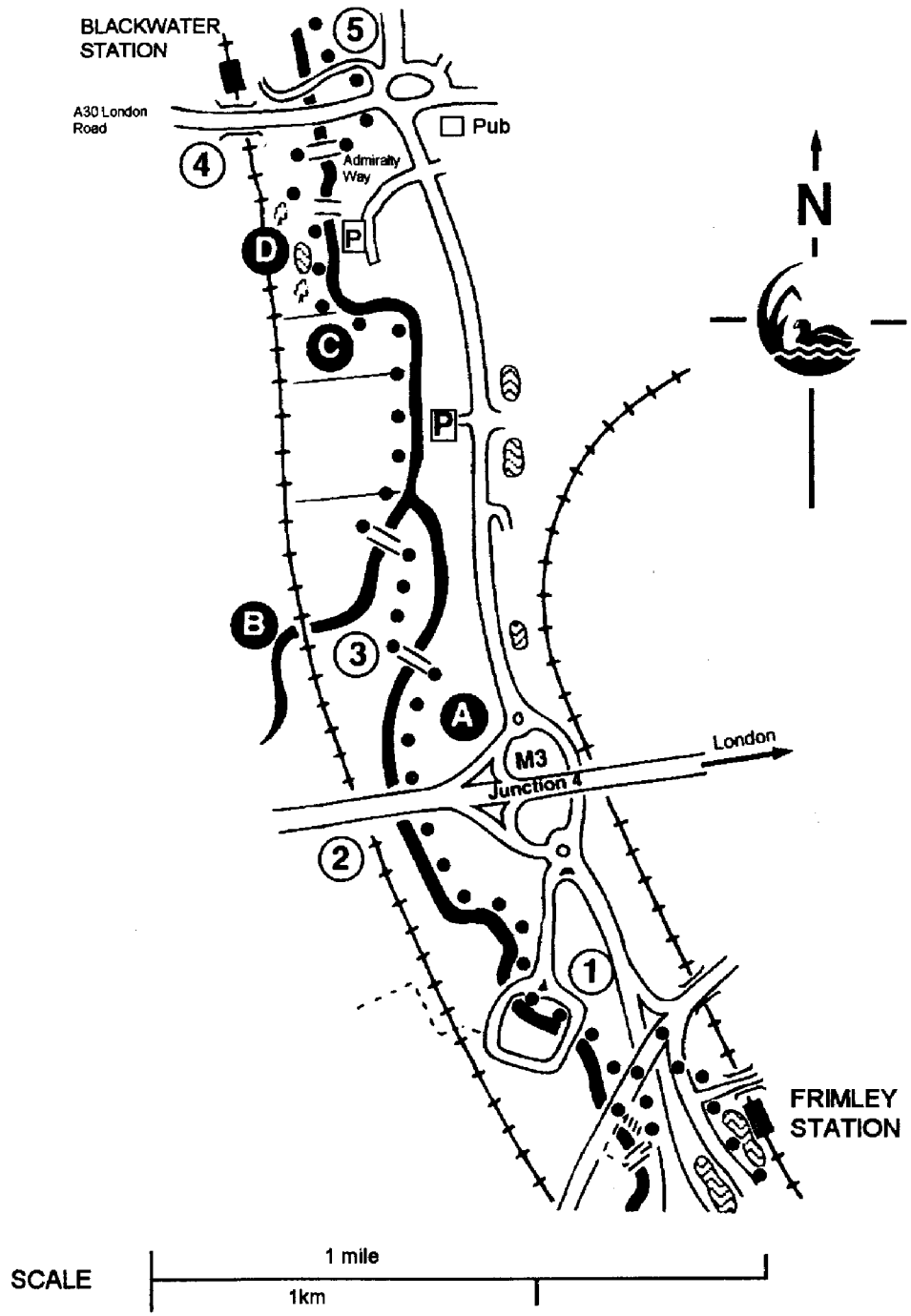
1. Follow River on its right bank
2. Follow the River under the motorway.
3. Cross the bridge turn right following the River.
4. Veer left across the field towards the bridge across Cove Brook. Turn right and follow left bank of River to the A30 ignoring first (flat iron girder) river bridge.
5. Just before A30 cross River using arched wooden footbridge.
6. Use controlled pedestrian crossings to cross A30 and join river path again.

A. HAWLEY MEADOWS
This field is the only place in Surrey where the Great Burnet grows, look for it just beyond the first footbridge. More can be seen just over the footbridge on the Hampshire side.
In May and June this section of the River Blackwater is used by many fish to spawn. At this time shoals of Chub and Bream can be easily seen, just upstream of the confluence with Cove Brook is a good place to look.

B. COVE BROOK
This slow flowing river supports dense aquatic vegetation such as Fringed Water-lily. In summer the river edge has colourful stands of many species, look for Marsh Woundwort by the confluence with the River Blackwater.

C. HAWLEY MEADOWS
These meadows at the northern end of the site were deliberately lowered to store flood water, they are always wet in winter and so favoured by snipe and ducks, but not by walkers who will appreciate waterproof footwear.

D. BLACKWATER PARK
This was once a gas works and railway sidings before being restored to a pleasant tree lined section of the River.



Section 8

BLACKWATER TO DERBY GREEN

Starting point SU854599. Distance 2.5 km (total 21.5 km).

1. From the road to Blackwater Station cross the Wish Stream to join the right bank of the River.

2. Follow the River first on the right bank and then on its left bank.

3. Eventually you must cross the River using a small footbridge then turn left and use the large ramped metal footbridge to cross the railway and River again.

4. Turn right to follow left bank of River to Swan Lane / Derby Green Lane.

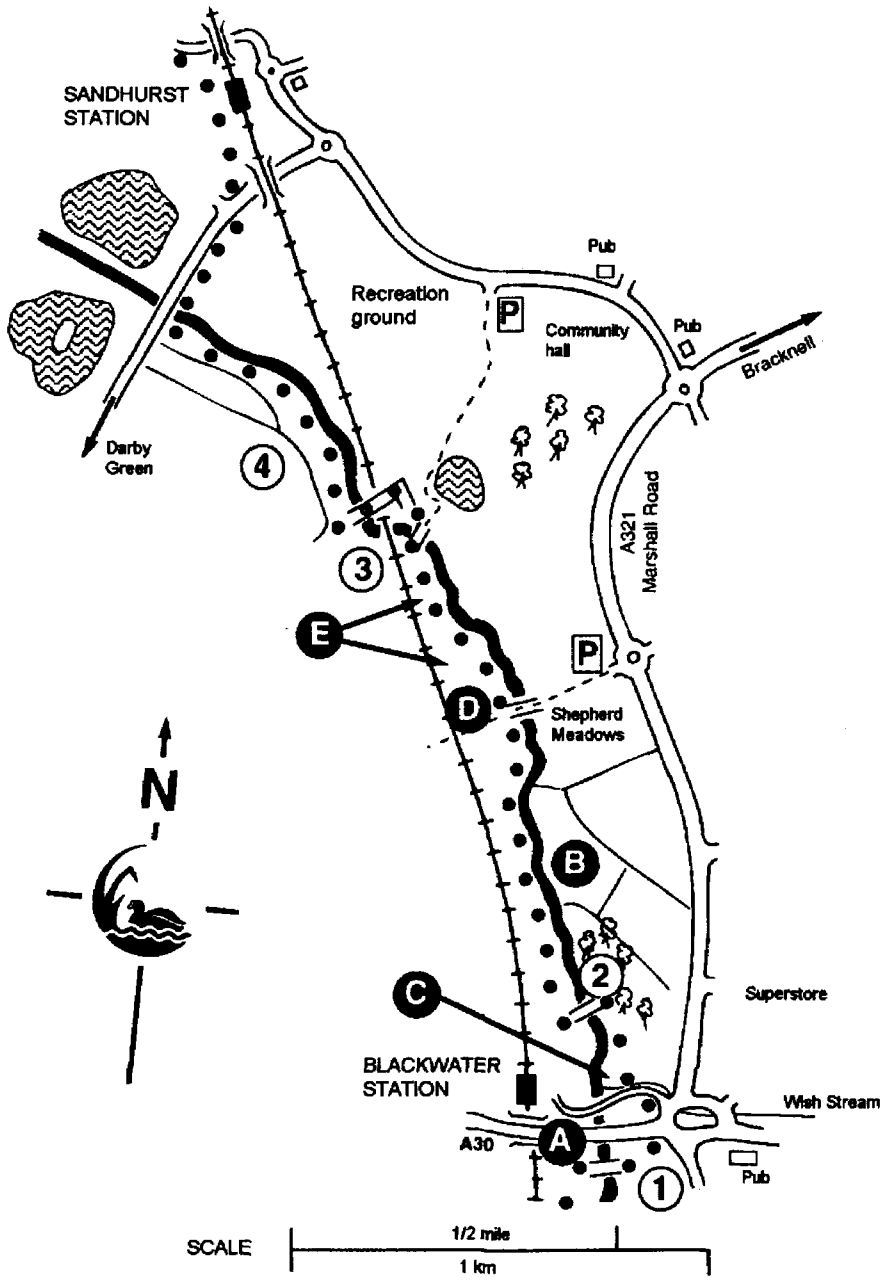
A. THREE SHIRES JUNCTION
The junction of the Wish Stream with the River Blackwater historically denotes the junction of Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. During the building of the new roundabout in 1990 the Wish Stream was diverted so now runs a few metres north of the boundary.

B. BLACKWATER VALLEY SITE OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST
This forms most of the open land in this section of the Valley. It is special because of the abundance of rare meadow and woodland plants. The meadows rich diversity have evolved through centuries of grazing and hay making preventing trees, shrubs and rank vegetation growing up to smother the smaller meadow plants. The fields continue to be managed this way. Please take care to shut gates when stock is present.

C. WHITE POPLAR
Look for the striking White Poplar on the river bend.

D. BLACK POPLAR
In the hedge by the track junction grows the very rare Black Poplar tree.

E. FLOWER RICH MEADOWS
In summer look for Orchids among the many other meadow flowers such as Sneezewort, Knapweed, Betony, Meadowsweet and Great Burnet.



DERBY GREEN TO SANDHURST

Starting point SU836609. Distance 2.3 km (total 23.8 km).

At present this is the one section of the Blackwater Valley where there is no riverside footpath. The riverside frontage is all within private ownership and although outline agreements to create a path have been reached with most owners progress to open the path remains stalled until all owners give the go ahead.

For those walking the whole Blackwater Valley Footpath, the following link using public roads is suggested.

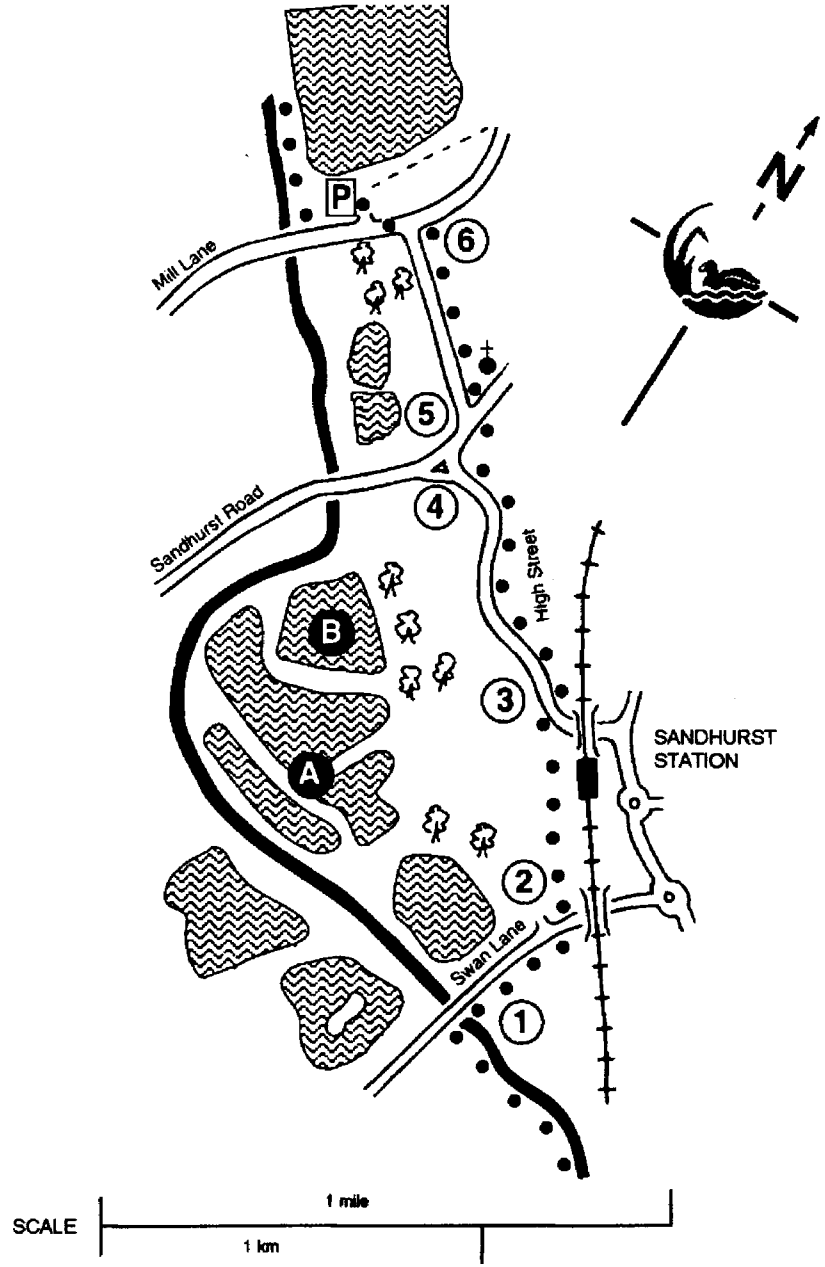
1. Turn right up Swan Lane.
2. Take public footpath left just before railway.
3. Turn left and follow High Street.
4. **Take care** crossing the first road on left (Yateley Road).
5. Take second left, Lower Church Road.
6. Turn left, then right into the Ramblers car park at Horseshoe Lake, in car park go left and follow path to River.

A. YATELEY LAKES

A large complex of fishing lakes. The lakes have gained national renown for the large carp they contain. Anglers will spend days camping beside the lakes to catch one of these fish which are known individually by name.

B. TRI LAKES

A privately run fishery and country park with childrens zoo, model railway, cafe and toilets. Small admission fee.



Section 10

SANDHURST TO FINCHAMPSTEAD

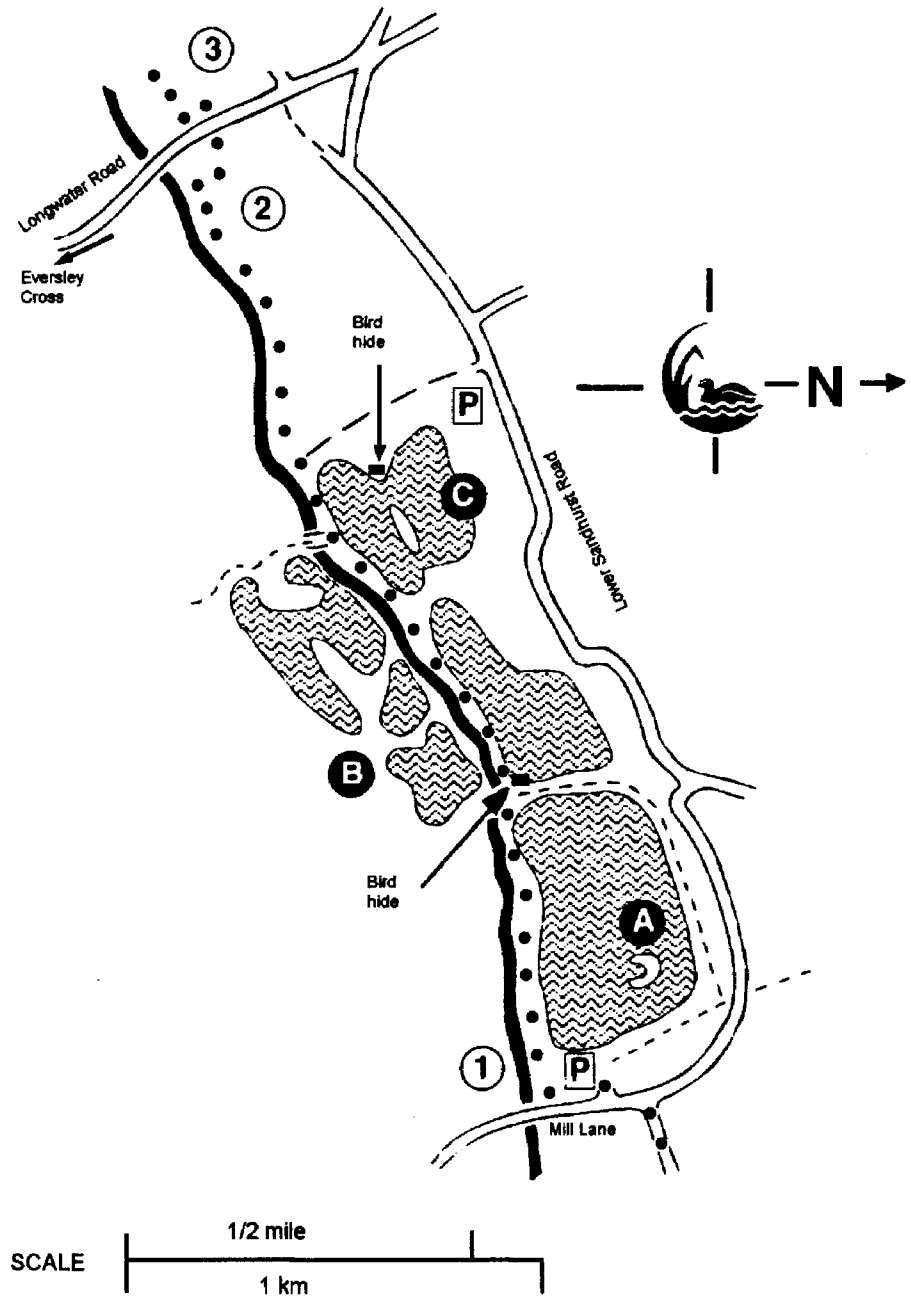
Starting point SU819619. Distance 2.8 km (total 26.6 km).

1. From Mill Bridge follow right bank of the River.
2. Just before Longwater Road turn right away from the River to go around building.
3. Cross Longwater Road with care, beware of fast traffic.

A. HORSESHOE LAKE
A centre aimed at teaching non motorised watersports; canoeing, sailing and windsurfing. A circular walk around the lake is possible.

B. BLACKWATER VALLEY WATERSPORTS
On the Hampshire side of the River. These lakes are used for powered watersports such as water skiing.

C. MOOR GREEN LAKES NATURE RESERVE
The premier site in the Blackwater Valley for wildlife, especially birds, on the former gravel pits. Wildfowl in winter are abundant with an ever growing flock of Goosander a speciality. Also seen in winter are Wigeon, Teal, Gadwall and Cormorants. In summer the species change with breeding Terns, Lapwings and Ringed Plovers using the specially provided islands. Two hides next to the footpath are open on Sundays for public use. They are available to members of the Moor Green Lakes Group every day all year round, telephone 01276 686615.



Section 11

FINCHAMPSTEAD TO EVERSLEY

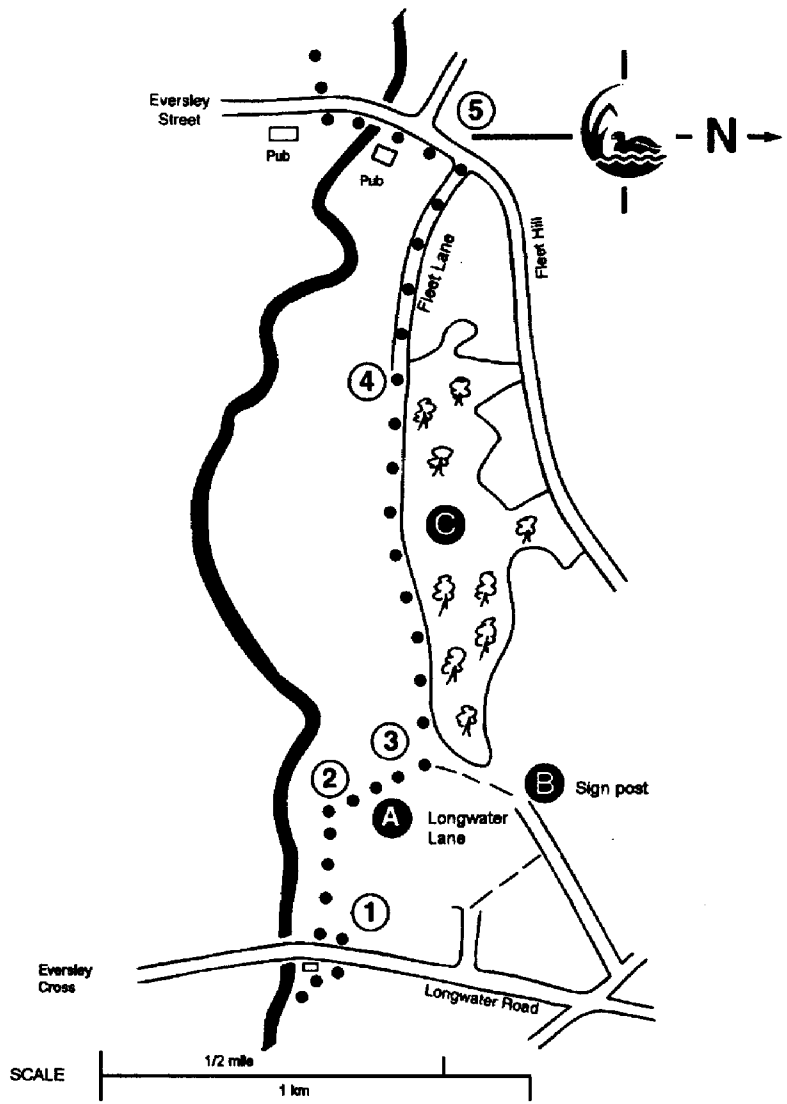
Starting point SU795624. Distance 2.4 km (total 29.0 km).

1. Once over Longwater Road turn left, and follow field edge (this section can become wet in winter).
2. Cross small footbridge over a ditch, then immediately turn right to join Longwater Lane
3. On reaching a wood on your left (Fleet Copse) turn left over a stile to walk along edge of the open fields.
4. Pass a farm and join the surfaced Fleet Lane to reach a road ahead.
5. Turn left alongside the road, pass a pub on the corner and continue over the River at Eversley Bridge.

A. LONGWATER LANE
The ancient route between Eversley and Finchampstead, lined with many ancient oak trees. This track and its ford across the River were still in use until the early years of this century.

B. COMMEMORATIVE SIGN POST
A post that details some of the lanes history can be found with a short detour.

C. FLEET COPSE
This woodland has existed in its present shape since at least 1761. The bank and ditch on the wood boundary is often a medieval feature so suggests the wood may be much more ancient. The structure of the wood, mature Oak trees with Hazel understorey, is obvious in winter. This structure is a result of its previous intensive management as coppiced woodland, the Hazel regularly being cut for small poles whilst the Oak was left to provide timber. In summer, butterflies may be seen as they seek out sunny and sheltered spots along the wood edge.



EVERSLEY TO NEW MILL

Starting point SU775625. Distance 1.9 km (total 30.9 km).

1. Cross Eversley Road opposite house called the 'Hundreds' (before the post box is reached) and go through the small gate beside Bakers Farm House.

2. The path is first narrow then widens to have an open character with a ditch on one side and open fields on the other.

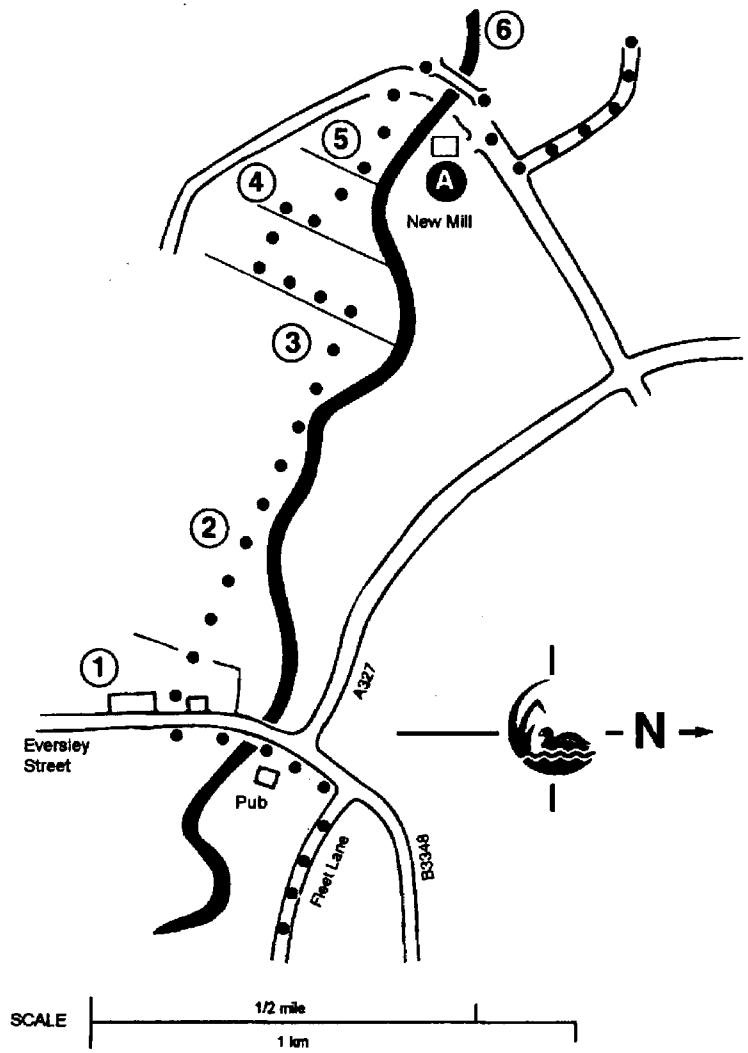
3. Climb over the stile, follow the wooded field boundary along to the left. At the corner of this field go through the kissing gate and directly right through an avenue of Holly trees.

4. Go right in front of the livery stables, then left into paddocks. (Mind your head on the footpath sign!)

5. Once in the second paddock veer left and exit the field through a kissing gate, follow the path and turn right onto the road leading down to New Mill.

6. Cross the River at New Mill passing the Mill itself, using the ford or footbridge.

A. NEW MILL
Now a restaurant but the sluice gates and mill pond are still present. This downstream section of the River Blackwater is large enough to support Barbel. A fish pass has recently been installed next to the sluice gates to enable these and other fish to move upstream, this is especially important during the spring spawning run.



Section 13

NEW MILL TO THATCHER'S FORD

Starting point SU762628. Distance 2.7 km (total 33.6 km).

1. Once over the ford follow the road east, away from the River then take first left down the minor, dead end road towards Greenacres Farm.

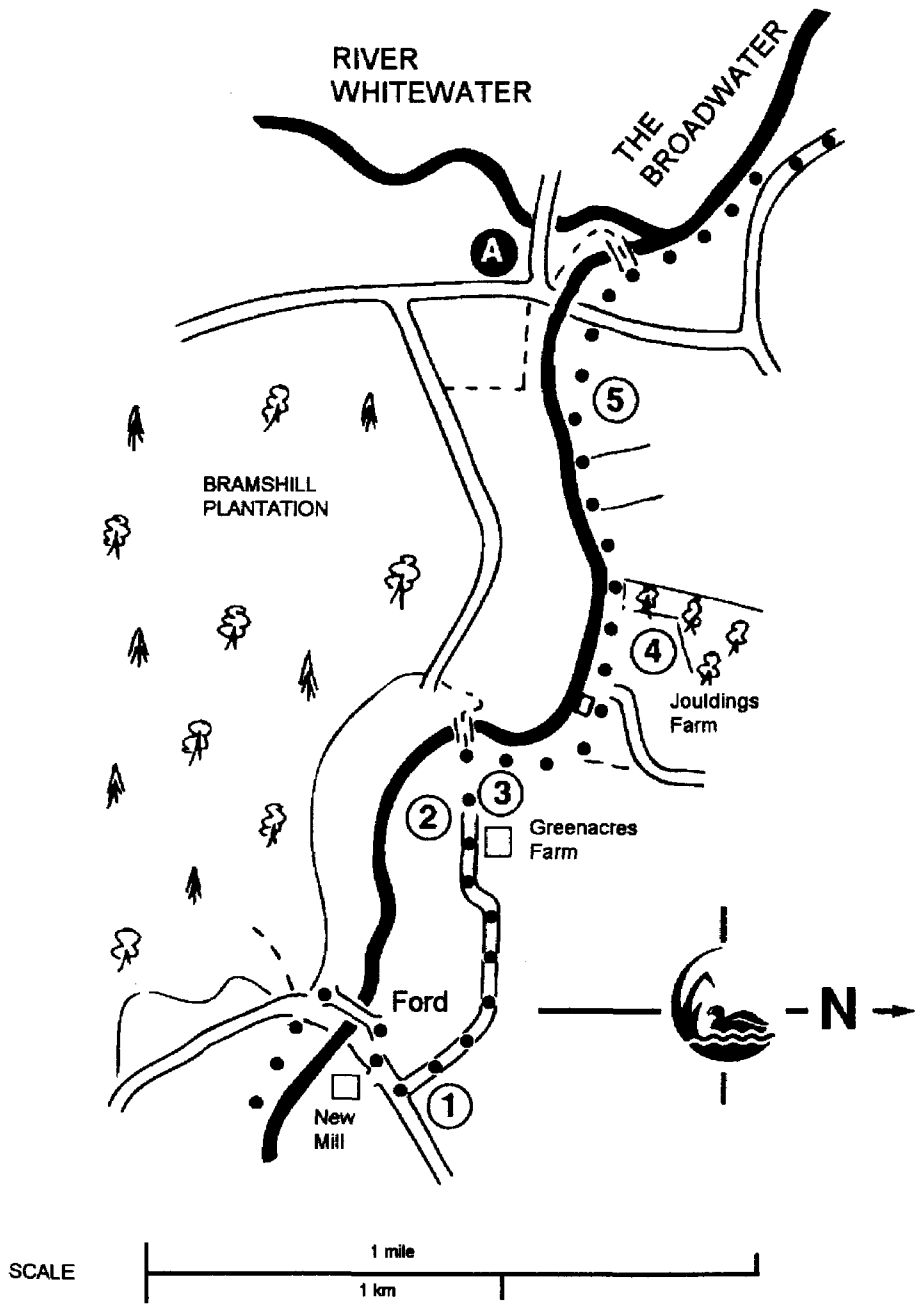
2. There are a couple of other dwellings along this road but after passing Greenacres Farm take the track leading down towards the River.

3. When track surfacing ends cross stile and follow the green lane. Turn right over stile and cross fields, keeping the fence and River close on your left.

4. At Jouldings Farm cross stile into field and head left to join the riverside path.

5. The path leaves the Rivers edge and heads up along a fields edge, before emerging at Thatcher's Ford.

A. THATCHER'S FORD
Marks the spot where the Roman highway crossed the River Blackwater heading towards the town of Calleva (near present day Silchester). The Blackwater Valley Footpath has been following this ancient route for the past half mile. From Jouldings Farm it heads to the higher ground of Finchampstead Ridges, the route here is now known as the Devil's Highway.



Section 14

THATCHER'S FORD TO SWALLOWFIELD

Starting point SU743634. Distance 4.5 km (total 38.1 km).

1. Cross the lane past the ford and join the riverside path again. Continue beside the River, past the confluence with the River Whitewater.

2. The path turns right away from the River Blackwater and leads up towards Nutbean Lane. Turn left onto the lane and follow it, past the Cemetery, to the main road into Swallowfield.

3. The following diversion avoids an unsafe stretch of road.
   Turn right and walk up towards the pub. Cross the road with care and take the footpath beside the pub. At the path junction go left and continue around the field edge, back down to the Swallowfield Road.

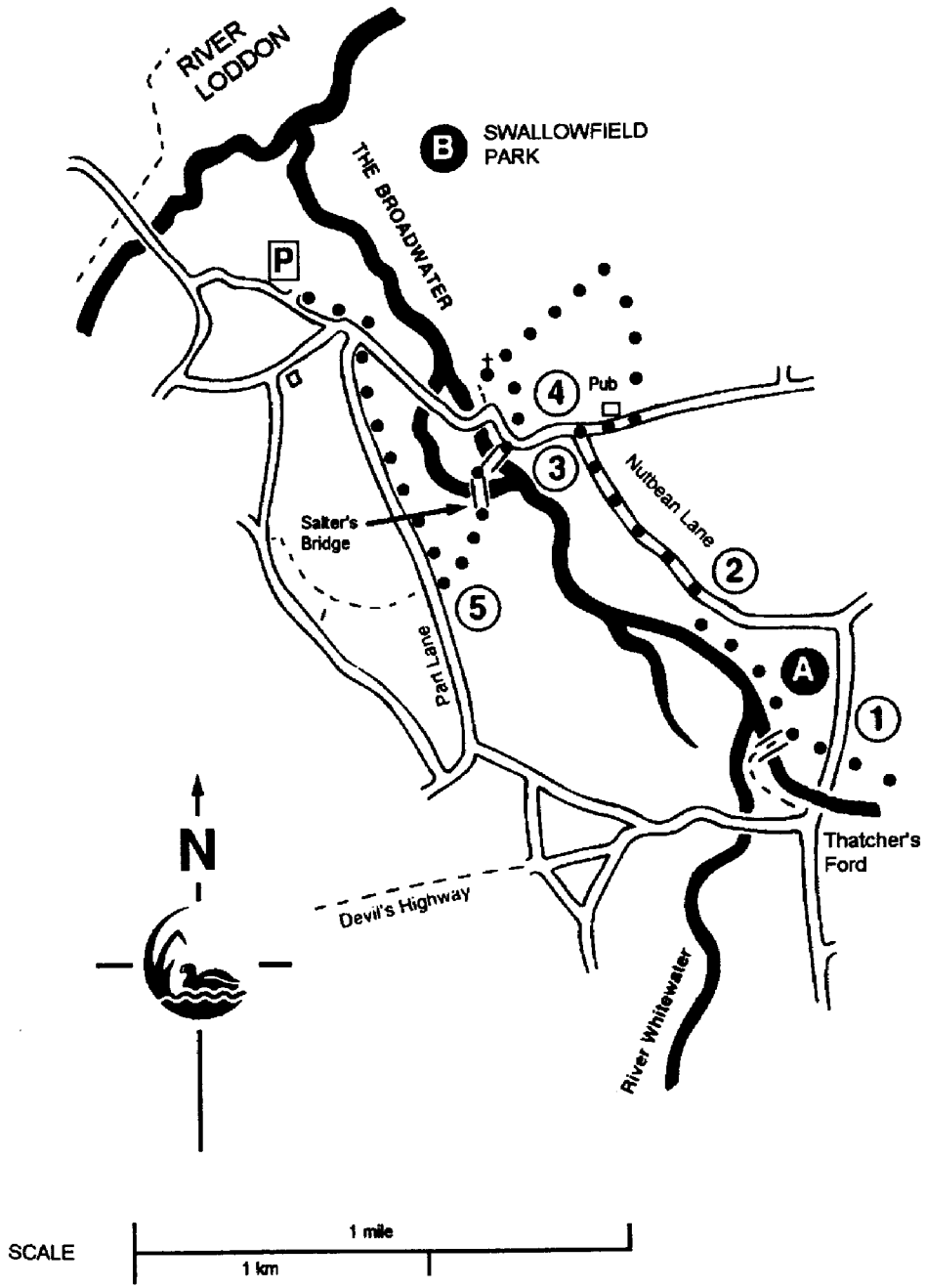
4. Cross the road with care veering left towards Salter's footbridge. Once over the two arms of the River you emerge into a meadow.

5. Turn right onto Part Lane and follow this into Swallowfield Village.

A. THE RIVER BLACKWATER
The River Blackwater here is far enough downstream from urban influences to support species intolerant of pollution, such as White-legged Damselflies.

CONFLUENCE
The effects of the alkaline water and increased volume from the River Whitewater is evident below the confluence. At this point the channel is known as the Broadwater. Here the flat dinner plate leaves of Yellow Water-lily and the dark green spears of true Bulrush appear.

B. SWALLOWFIELD PARK
The older house is surrounded by a walled garden constructed by Thomas Pitt in 1722 who also erected the five arch bridge over the River Blackwater. The garden contains a wide variety of trees and overlooks the River Loddon. Open Wednesdays and Thursdays in summer.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Blackwater Valley Service gratefully acknowledges the help of all those involved in creating and maintaining this footpath, in particular the many landowners over whose property new sections of path have been created.

A special mention to the Blackwater Valley Conservation Volunteers who regularly work to maintain and sign the route.

The Service would also like to thank Stella Tasker who provided detailed text and maps for sections 7 and 8, not all of which we were able to include in this booklet.

Mr S.F.G. Farmer provided many helpful comments on the first edition of this booklet which we have incorporated into this revised edition.

NOTES

BLACKWATER VALLEY
Recreation & Countryside
MANAGEMENT SERVICE

The Blackwater Valley Recreation and Countryside Management Service operates along the borders of Hampshire, Surrey and Berkshire from Farnham to Eversley

The Service is funded by 14 local authorities to coordinate recreational and environmental improvements in the area.

Over the last 10 years, the service has turned former areas of gravel pits, tips and urban fringe activities into a variety of nature areas, country parks, watersport facilities and recreational resources all linked by the new riverside footpath.

This work could not have been carried out without the help and support of the many clubs, organisations and volunteers active locally

MAP SYMBOLS

- Blackwater Valley Footpath
- Other paths and tracks
- Road
- P Car park
- River/Bridge
- Lake
- Railway/Station
- Woodland

The Blackwater Valley Footpath

The Blackwater Valley Footpath is a new path being created alongside the River Blackwater. It is now possible to walk from the source of the River Blackwater near Farnham, Surrey to the confluence at Swallowfield, Berkshire.

The path runs through varied and interesting landscapes, from tree-lined lakes and flowery meadows to deepest rural countryside.

Many of the sections are new and do not appear on Ordnance Survey or other maps. This booklet contains the essential details to enable you to find your way together with brief details of some points of interest that you pass.

It is vital information for all who live and walk in the Blackwater Valley.

Blackwater Valley